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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1598  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001375

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AF/S FOR S. HILL  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN  
USAID FOR M. COPSON AND E. LOKEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: ZANU-PF INSIDER ON MUGABE'S PLANS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

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Summary  
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11. (C) ZANU-PF insider Eddie Zvobgo, Jr. told the Ambassador November 14 that President Mugabe has talked about resigning but is concerned that he may be prosecuted by his successors. Zvobgo said if Mugabe clings to power too long a crisis could develop as the economy continues to deteriorate. Young ZANU-PF Turks, with whom Zvobgo is affiliated, are flexing their muscles in an effort to wield more power but are not yet prepared to revolt. The military has expressed concern about the current situation but has been bought off for now and is also not yet prepared to act. Zvobgo added that longer-term the MDC remained popular and a threat to ZANU-PF rule despite recent electoral defeats. The Ambassador responded that the USG is not focusing on Mugabe but on what comes next and how we can play a constructive role. End Summary.

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Mugabe Endgame Nearing?  
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12. (C) According to Zvobgo, Mugabe is tired and has talked of leaving. Avenues could include establishing the office of prime minister and giving that individual executive authority while remaining president or leaving government altogether but retaining control of the party structure. Zvobgo said, however, that Mugabe is concerned about giving up control and then being prosecuted by his successor, as occurred in neighboring Zambia and Malawi.

13. (C) Zvogbo expressed concern that if Mugabe tries to hang on too long there could be a crisis. ZANU-PF knows what to do to fix the economy but the self-interest of key insiders has prevented the party from taking the needed reforms. Frustration with this policy drift is fueling discontent among regime loyalists, including the "Young Turks" in parliament with whom Zvobgo associates. That said, Mugabe is the country's first president and a liberation hero and there is reluctance to force him out.

14. (C) The Ambassador referred to the common knowledge in Zimbabwe that senior military leaders had urged the president to step aside and noted that the military is not immune from the economic melt down. Could they force him out? Zvogbo responded that historically they have been bought off with cars and farms. While the military has expressed concern about the economic situation in Zimbabwe, they have not opposed Mugabe. Mugabe at present can handle the military but that could change and may be very different for his successor.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked whether the December ZANU-PF party conference was likely to provide clarification on succession and when presidential elections will take place. Zvogbo replied that clarity would alienate the faction not anointed as successor. Therefore, it was in Mugabe's interest to delay decisions. Moreover, it's still an advantage for Mugabe to be politically indecisive. ZANU-PF players try to curry favor with him while the president remains the ultimate power broker.

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Parliamentary Independence

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16. (C) The Ambassador asked about the recent activity of Parliamentary Portfolio Committees in investigating actions of government ministries and calling ministers to testify. Zvobgo responded that the Young Turks were also growing impatient with the executive holding all the reins of power. Zvogbo said the parliamentarians want to exercise power and improve governance.

17. (C) Zvogbo said the executive branch, embarrassed by revelations of government misconduct, was beginning to push back and that Parliamentary speaker John Nkomo is in a &tricky8 position, on the one hand charged with presiding over parliament, on the other expected to protect the government. The Ambassador said that to his mind, this was a positive development that perhaps indicated ZANU-PF has the capacity for renovation. When change occurs, ZANU-PF moderates can participate or even take the lead.

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On the recent elections  
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18. (C) Commenting on the recent rural council elections, Zvogbo said low turnout was the key factor in the result. This was in large part due, he said, to the fact that people are discouraged at the lack of change. He noted the apathy among ZANU-PF voters in his home province of Masvingo. He said there remains a huge pool of potential support for the MDC, which could threaten ZANU-PF's hold on power in a free and fair election.

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The USG\*Looking Ahead  
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19. (C) Zvogbo asked the Ambassador what USG plans are for engagement with the government. The Ambassador replied that there is no basis for bridge building with the present regime. We're concentrating on what comes next. The recent

ABAZ conference is an example of an effort to talk constructively about what can be done in the transitional period and beyond to rebuild Zimbabwe. We want to talk with people in the business community, in ZANU-PF, and throughout Zimbabwe about the future and how the USG can play a constructive role. Zvogbo welcomed the Ambassador's comments. He added that USG food aid and HIV/AIDS assistance continues to demonstrate the good will of the U.S. toward Zimbabwe and is appreciated by the people if not the government.

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Comment  
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110. (C) Zvogbo, the son and namesake of Mugabe's late Vice President and nemesis, provided an inside look at ZANU-PF that confirms other reports of unrest within the ruling party. It appears increasingly the case that if Mugabe continues to delay the inevitable, he may spark open dissent in his own party. The December conference, or rather its aftermath, could be critical in that regard. If, as expected, Mugabe once again puts off any discussion of the succession, we could see a spike in internal opposition with unpredictable consequences.

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